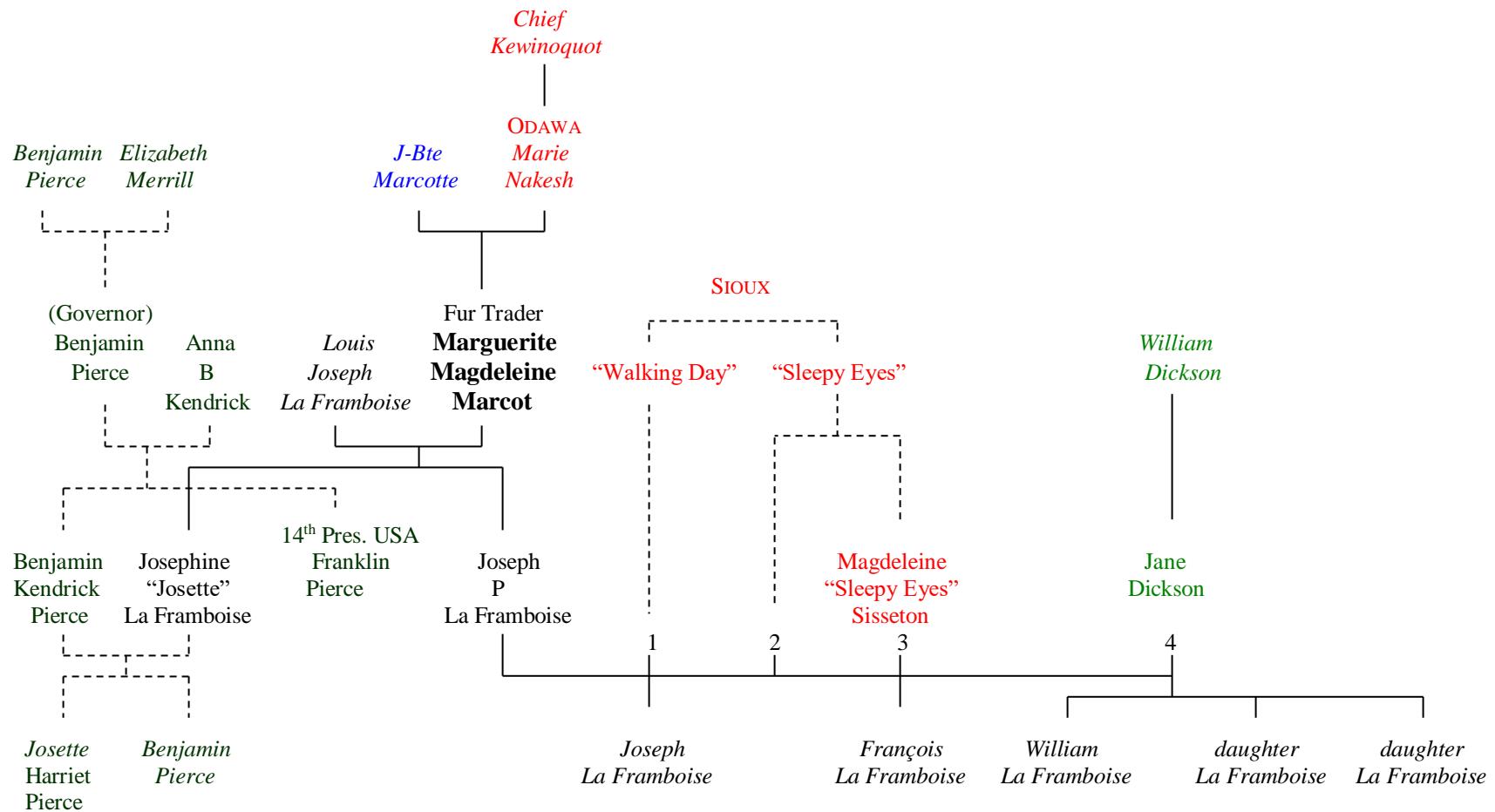


Genealogy of Madame Magdeleine La Framboise

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Madame Magdeleine La Framboise

Magdeleine La Framboise (1780-1846) was the daughter of a French-Canadienne fur trader, Jean-Baptiste Marcotte (1720-1783), and an Odawa (Ottawa) mother, Marie Nakesh (c.1740-c.1790), daughter of Chief Kewinoquot. She was one of the most prominent fur traders conducting business in the Northwest Territory (*later known as Michigan*).

Madeleine La Framboise was born in February 1781, on Mackinac Island (Michigan), after her parents were removed from **St-Joseph** by the British;¹ she was baptized on 1 August 1786, on Mackinac Island. Madeleine was only three months old when her father died. She was raised among her mother's people in a **Lac Courtes Oreille** (Ojibwe) village on Mackinac Island, founded by French settlers, near the mouth of the Grand River, (*near Grand Haven, Michigan*); this fur-trading outpost was called **Gabagouache**² by the Pottawattamie (and Ottawa) natives, and was a major trade route into the interior. In the language of the Ottawa, the word "Gabagouache" described "the widening of the river and the slowing of the current as the flow reached Lake Michigan."

By the time Madeleine was 15 years of age, in 1794, she married Joseph La Framboise (1765-1806); their first daughter, Josette was born on 24 September 1795 (died 1806); she was baptized in 1799, at St-Anne's of Mackinac, and was the first entry in the church's register. Madeleine was a great asset to her husband in the fur trade, in addition to speaking four languages fluently: French, English, Ottawa, and Chippewa, although she could neither read nor write in any language, she knew the fur trade and assisted in negotiations.

Although Madeleine and Joseph were already married *à la façon du pays*, a Catholic priest solemnized their marriage on 11 July 1804, on Mackinac Island. In March 1805, Madeleine birthed a son named Joseph La Framboise (died 1856).

¹ Mackinac Archives

² The trading post was later taken over by business tycoon and first millionaire in the United States, John Jacob Astor and, by the late eighteenth century, the American Fur Company was operating twenty posts in the area. From 1809 to 1821, Astor's posts were managed by Madame La Framboise; and, when she retired to Mackinac Island, she was replaced by **Rix Robinson**, often credited for laying the foundation of Michigan.

Madeleine and Joseph owned many trading posts *in west Michigan*: Every fall they would travel with merchandise to trade with the Ottawa natives from Mackinac Island down to the Grand River area to *present-day Ada (Michigan)*, where they built another trading post - the first permanent mercantile building in west Michigan. Every spring they would return to Mackinac Island with their furs.

In 1806, Joseph La Framboise was killed by a savage at their trading post, *near present-day Lowell*. At this point, Madeleine gathered up her winter furs and took her husband's body to Mackinac Island. A widow raising two children, she continued to manage several trading posts in the *pays d'en haut*, or "savage country",³ expanding her business *throughout the western and northern portions of Michigan's Lower Peninsula*.

For the next fourteen years, Madame La Framboise continued wintering in the Grand River Valley trading, and, in the late spring, supervising the transportation of the winter furs to Mackinac Island. She was no ordinary woman; intelligent, always fair in her trades, and, in a time when an experienced fur trapper could earn \$1000 per year, she was earning \$5000-to-\$10,000 per year. She amassed a fortune, built a very fine home on Mackinac Island, and was able to provide a Montreal education for her children.

On 2 April 1816, her accomplished and educated daughter, Josette, married Benjamin K. Pierce (1790-1850), commandant of the fort and brother of a future President of the United States Franklin Pierce. The event of the summer, the marriage took place at the home of the Mitchell's - Madeleine's friends. The wedding guests wore their finest silks and satins, whilst Madame La Framboise, **Therese Schindler**, Josette's aunt, and **Elizabeth Mitchell** wore their best traditional regalia.

By age 41, Madame La Framboise was so successful that John Jacob Astor of the American Fur Company monopoly, a competitor, in 1818, convinced her to merge with the **American Fur Company** to her advantage - and, a wealthy woman, she was able to live in great comfort the rest of her life. However, after only four years of marriage, Josette and her infant son Benjamin died, on 4 November 1820, and are buried in Ste-Anne's churchyard on Mackinac

³ *A Snug Little Place: Memories of Ada, Michigan 1821-1930*; Ada Historical Society/Jane Siegel, 1993 (Siegel 1993), p 23

Island; and, Benjamin Pierce surrendered his surviving child, Josette Harriett, to the care of her grandmother, Madame La Framboise.

At her retirement from fur-trading, Madame La Framboise taught her to read and write French and English. She supported the first school on the island, becoming a Sunday school teacher at Ste-Anne's Church; she was very active in the parish, listed as godmother for many baptisms and witnessing many marriages. Her home, at times a school, was used for religious purposes and, at times, a welcome haven for entertaining passing notables, such as, **Alexis de Tocqueville**, John and **Juliette Kinzie**, **Henry Rowe Schoolcraft**, as well as her own native family members. (She surpassed her remarkable achievements in the fur-trade by her efforts to educate the young.)

When the church leaders decided to move the church from its original location, La Framboise donated the property next to her home as the new site. In exchange for her gift, she requested to be buried beneath the alter of Ste-Anne's Church on Mackinac Island, at the end of her life.

At her death on 4 April 1846, Madeleine La Framboise was buried under the church alter along side of her daughter, Josephine "Josette"; in her will, Madeleine left her stately home to granddaughter Josette Harriet Pierce, and provided amply for her son François and friend **Agatha Biddle**. During the last half of the 20th century, the tombs were removed from beneath the church to a garden on the grounds for renovations - and her lovely home is now a hotel.

Madame La Framboise's son, Joseph, became a fur trader, living most of his life along the Minnesota River Valley. He married Magdeleine "Sleepy Eyes" Sisseton, a Sioux, around 1827. They had one son, François La Framboise. Joseph's second wife was Jane Dickson, the daughter of fur-trader William Dickson.

Joseph La Framboise died on 9 November 1856, in Nicolllet County, Minnesota.